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UTILITY
PATENT APPLICATION
TRANSMITTAL

(Only for new nonprovisional applications under 37 CFR 1.53(b))

Attorney Docket No. M-3417-2C US

First Named Inventor or Application Identifier Finarov, Moshe

Title Apparatus For Optical Inspection Of Wafers During Polishing

Express Mail Label No. EL 375 478 733 US

APPLICATION ELEMENTS

See MPEP chapter 600 concerning utility patent application contents

ADDRESS TO: Assistant Commissioner for Patents

Box Patent Application
Washington, D.C. 202311. Fee Transmittal Form - *see page 2 of this form.*

(Submit an original, and a duplicate for fee processing)

2. Application:

Specification: (preferred arrangement set forth below)
Descriptive title of the Invention,
Cross References to Related Applications,
Reference to Microfiche Appendix,
Background of the Invention,
Brief Summary of the Invention,
Brief Description of the Drawings, and
Detailed Description (all totaling 9 pages)
Appendix(es) _____, & _____ (_____ pages)

Claim(s) 3 pages
 Abstract of the Disclosure 1 page

3. Drawing(s) (35 USC 113) [Total Sheets 7]4. Oath or Declaration unsigned [Total Pages 3]

Newly executed (original or copy)
 Copy from prior application (37 CFR §1.63(d))
(for continuation/divisional with Box 17 completed)

c. DELETION OF INVENTOR(S)Signed statement attached deleting inventor(s) named in the prior application,
see 37 CFR 1.63(d)(2) and 1.33(b)5. Incorporation By Reference (useable if Box 4b is checked)
The entire disclosure of the prior application, from
which a copy of the oath or declaration is supplied
under Box 4b, is considered as being part of the
disclosure of the accompanying application and is
hereby incorporated by reference therein.

6. Microfiche Computer Program Appendix
consisting of _____ pages of microfiche containing _____
frames on each page in accompanying envelope.

7. Nucleotide and/or Amino Acid Sequence Submission
(if applicable, all necessary)

a. Computer Readable Copy
b. Paper Copy (identical to computer copy)
c. Statement verifying identity of above copies

ACCOMPANYING APPLICATION PARTS

8. Copy of the Assignment Papers (cover sheet & documents) 3
pages9. 37 CFR §3.73(b) Statement Power of Attorney
(combined when there is an _____ with Patent Declaration
Assignee) _____ above.)10. English Translation Document (if applicable)11. Information Disclosure Copies of IDS
Statement (IDS) & PTO-1449 Citations/References12. Preliminary Amendment 5 pages13. Return Receipt Postcard (MPEP 503)
(should be specifically itemized)

14. Small Entity Status

Small Entity Statement Enclosed _____ pages
 Statement filed in prior application; and
status still proper and desired

 Is no longer claimed.15. Certified Copy of Priority Document(s)
(if foreign priority is claimed)16. Other:

Copy of Petition for Extension of Time filed in parent appln.;
 Request to Amend Drawings with two sheets of
marked-up drawings.

17. If a CONTINUING APPLICATION, check appropriate box and supply the requisite information and a preliminary amendment:

 Continuation Divisional of prior application No. 08/497,382

Filed on June 29, 1995, entitled: Apparatus For Optical Inspection Of Wafers During Polishing.

PRIOR APPLICATION INFORMATION: Examiner E. Morgan Group Art Unit 3723

18. CORRESPONDENCE ADDRESS

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19. Fee calculations.

CLAIMS (Number Filed)	(1) FOR	(2)		(3) NUMBER EXTRA		(4) RATE		(5) CALCULATIONS
15	TOTAL CLAIMS (37 CFR 1.16(c))	-20	=	0	x	\$18	=	\$ 0.00
2	INDEPENDENT CLAIMS (37 CFR 1.16(b))	-3	=	0	x	\$78	=	\$ 0.00
<input type="checkbox"/>	MULTIPLE DEPENDENT CLAIMS (if applicable) (37 CFR 1.18(d))				+	\$260.00	=	
						BASIC FEE (37 CFR 1.16(a))	=	\$ 690.00
						Total of above Calculations	=	\$ 690.00
						Reduction by 50% for filing by small entity (Note 31 CFR 1.9, 1.27, 1.28)	=	\$-345.00
							TOTAL	\$ 345.00

20. FEES: The Commissioner is hereby authorized to credit overpayments or charge the following fees to Deposit Account No. **19-2386**:

- a. Fees required under 37 CFR 1.16. (U.S. Application Filing Fees)
- b. Fees required under 37 CFR 1.17. (Conditional Extension of Time Fees)
- c. Fees required under 37 CFR 1.18. (Patent Issue Fees)

21. Other: Copy of Notice of Recordation of Assignment Document (from USSN 08/497,382 (2 pages)).

NOTE:

The prior application's correspondence address will carry over to this UPA UNLESS a new correspondence address is provided below.

22. NEW CORRESPONDENCE ADDRESS

<input type="checkbox"/> Customer Number or Bar Code Label	<input type="checkbox"/> New correspondence address below		
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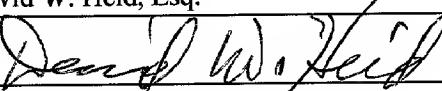
23. SIGNATURE OF APPLICANT, ATTORNEY, OR AGENT REQUIRED

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IN THE UNITED STATES PATENT AND TRADEMARK OFFICE

Applicant(s): Moshe Finarov; Eran Dvir; Eli Haimovich; Benjamin Shulman
Assignee: Nova Measuring Instruments, Ltd.
Title: APPARATUS FOR OPTICAL INSPECTION OF WAFERS DURING
POLISHING
Serial No.: Unknown Filed: Herewith
Examiner: Unknown Group Art Unit: Unknown
Docket No.: M-3417-2C US

San Jose, California
February 4, 2000

BOX PATENT APPLICATION
ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER FOR PATENTS
WASHINGTON, D. C. 20231

Dear Sir:

PRELIMINARY AMENDMENT

This Paper is submitted prior to examination of the above-listed patent application, a Continuation of U.S. Patent Application Serial No. 08/497,382, filed on June 29, 1995, (hereinafter "the Parent Application"), which has been allowed.

Please amend the Patent Application as follows.

IN THE DRAWINGS

Please amend FIGS. 6, 7, 8 and 9 as indicated in red ink on the enclosed copies of those figures as filed in Parent Application.

IN THE SPECIFICATION

On page 1, immediately above FIELD OF THE INVENTION, insert the following section.

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598438 v1

--CROSS REFERENCE TO RELATED APPLICATION

This application is a continuation of U.S. Patent Application Serial No. 08/497,382 filed June 29, 1995, now allowed, which is incorporated by reference herein in its entirety.--;

Page 2, line 2, kindly change "is produced found in" to --is--;

Page 3, line 16, delete "or water.:";

Page 6, line 9, kindly change "16" to --18--;

Page 7, line 14, kindly change "wafers" to --wafer--;

Page 7, line 30, kindly change "focusses" to --focuses--;

Page 8, line 2, kindly change "114" to --116--;

Page 8, line 3, kindly change "114" to --116--;

Page 8, line 11, kindly change "focusses" to --focuses--;

Page 8, line 11, kindly change "114" to --116--;

Page 8, line 14, kindly change "114" to --116--;

Page 8, line 17, kindly change "10 - 14" to --10 - 13--.

IN THE CLAIMS

Cancel Claims 1-16 and substitute new Claims 1-15 as set forth below.

1. A semiconductor article processing apparatus comprising:
a processing unit having a working area for processing a top layer of an article;
an optical measurement station adjacent to said processing unit; and
a transporter for transporting said article between said processing unit and said optical measurement station;
said optical measurement station located outside said working area and comprising:
an optical measuring unit for measuring a desired parameter of said top layer
and;
a holding unit for receiving and holding said article in a stationary
measurement position;

said holding unit having a window, through which at least a portion of the top layer of said article is viewable by said optical measuring unit.

2. The apparatus of Claim 1, wherein said working area contains a working medium and said holding unit contains a connecting medium having properties similar to those of said working medium.

3. The apparatus of Claim 2, wherein said processing unit is a polisher.

4. The apparatus of Claim 3, wherein said optical measurement unit comprises a spectrophotometer.

5. the apparatus of Claim 4, wherein said optical measurement station measures a thickness of at least a top layer of said article.

6. The apparatus of Claim 3, wherein said article is a semiconductor wafer.

7. The apparatus of Claim 5, wherein said optical measurement unit comprises an imager for imaging said article in order to carry out said thickness measurements of said top layer on pre-determined features of the article's pattern.

8. A method for processing the surface of a semiconductor article, having at least one layer thereon comprising the steps of:

applying processing to said surface of said semiconductor article in a working area of a processing unit, wherein said step of processing is performed in a working medium;

conveying said article from said working zone into a measuring area of an optical measurement station located outside said working zone and adjacent to said processing unit, wherein said measuring area is separated from said optical assembly of said optical measurement station by a substantially transparent window;

holding said article in a fixed position; and

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measuring a desired parameter of at least one layer of said article surface through said transparent window.

9. The method of Claim 8, wherein said measuring area contains a uniform connecting medium transposed between said measuring area and said window.

10. The method of Claim 9, wherein said uniform connecting medium has properties similar to those of said working medium.

11. The method of Claim 10, wherein said step of processing is chemical mechanical polishing and wherein said processing unit is a polisher.

12. The method of Claim 11, wherein said uniform connecting medium is water.

13. The method of Claim 9, wherein said desired parameter is thickness of said at least one layer.

14. The method of Claim 9, wherein said step of measuring comprises making a spectrophotometric measurement.

15. The method of Claim 14, wherein said article comprises a semiconductor wafer.

REMARKS

Entry of the Amendment, prior to the examination of the instant patent application is respectfully requested.

The above-requested amendments to the specification and drawings correspond to those made in the Parent Application. The amendments to the specification are made to correct obvious typographical, grammatical and spelling errors, and to ensure uniformity of the text with the drawings. The drawing amendments are requested to correct items which were numbered incorrectly and to conform the drawings to the specification. None of the above amendments enter new matter.

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Claims 1-15 are presently pending in the instant application.

Should the Examiner have any question or comment as to the form, content or entry of this Amendment, the Examiner is requested to contact the undersigned at the telephone number below. Similarly, if there are any further issues yet to be resolved to advance the prosecution of this application to issue, the Examiner is requested to telephone the undersigned counsel.

Allowance of all pending claims, 1-15, is respectfully requested.

EXPRESS MAIL LABEL NO:

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Respectfully submitted,



David W. Heid
Attorney for Applicant(s)
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598438 v1

APPARATUS FOR OPTICAL INSPECTION OF WAFERS DURING POLISHING
Eran Dvir, Moshe Finarov, Eli Haimovich and Benjamin Shulman

FIELD OF THE INVENTION

5

The present invention relates to wafer polishing apparatus in general and to measuring systems incorporated into such apparatus in particular.

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

10

Wafer polishing systems are known in the art. They polish the top layer of semiconductor wafers to a desired thickness. To do so, the wafer being polished is immersed in a slurry of water and chemicals during the polishing process. Once the wafer has been polished and washed down, it is placed into an exit station known by some companies as a "water track", after which the wafer is placed into a cassette of wafers. The cassette is maintained within a water bath until full, after which the entire cassette is brought to a cleaning station to remove any chemicals and slurry particles still remaining on the wafers in the cassette and to dry the wafers. After cleaning, the wafers are brought to a measurement station to determine if the polisher produced the desired thickness of their top layers.

15

Fig. 1, to which reference is now briefly made, illustrates a prior art water track, such as the water track of the #372 Polisher manufactured by IPEC Westech Inc. of Phoenix, Arizona, USA. The water track, labeled 10, comprises a frame 12 and a base 14. Frame 12 has jet holes 16 connected to jets (not shown) which emit streams 18 of water through holes 16. Base 14 has holes 20 connected to bubblers (not shown) which bubble small amounts of water 22 through holes 20. When a wafer 25 is dropped into water track 10, pattern-side down, the jets and bubblers are activated. Streams 18, from the water jets, serve to force the wafer 25 in the direction indicated by arrow 24. Small streams 22 push the wafer 25 slightly away from the base 14 and ensure that, while the wafer 25 moves through the track, it never rubs against base 14 and thus, the pattern on the wafer is not scratched.

Other companies produce polishers whose exit stations are formed just of the cassettes. Such a polisher is produced found in the 6DS-SP polisher of R. Howard Strasbaugh Inc. San Luis Obispo, California, USA.

SUMMARY OF THE PRESENT INVENTION

It is an object of the present invention to provide a measurement system installable within a polishing machine and, more specifically, within the exit station of a polishing machine.

In accordance with a preferred embodiment of the present invention, the present invention includes an optical system, which views the wafer through a window in the exit station, and a gripping system, which places the wafer in a predetermined viewing location within the exit station while maintaining the patterned surface completely under water. The present invention also includes a pull-down unit for pulling the measurement system slightly below the horizontal prior to the measurement and returns the measuring system to horizontal afterwards.

In accordance with a first preferred embodiment of the present invention, the gripping system includes a raisable gate which collects the wafer in a predetermined location, and a gripper which grips the wafer, carries it to the viewing location and immerses the wafer, along a small angle to the horizontal, in the water or water. The gripper also holds the wafer in place during the measurement operation, after which, it releases the wafer and the raisable gate is raised.

The present invention incorporates the method of immersing an object into water such that very few bubbles are produced on the wafer surface. The method of the present invention preferably includes the step of immersing the object while it is held such that its surface plane is at a small angle to the horizontal.

In a second embodiment, the measurement system includes a water bath and a gripping system thereabove. The gripping system includes wafer holding elements, which receive the wafer, and a gripper whose initial location is above the expected reception location of the wafer. The gripper is flexibly connected at an angle to a piston such that the wafer is immersed in the water at an angle to the horizontal.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

The present invention will be understood and appreciated more fully from the following detailed description taken in conjunction with the drawings in which:

5 Fig. 1 is a schematic illustration of a prior art water track;

Fig. 2 is a schematic illustration of a measurement system installable within a polishing machine, the measurement system being constructed and operative in accordance with a preferred embodiment of the present invention;

10 Figs. 3, 4, 5, 6, 7 and 8 are schematic, side view illustrations of a gripping system forming part of the measurement system of Fig. 2 in various stages of operation;

Fig. 9 is a schematic illustration of an example optical system forming part of the measurement system of the present invention;

15 Fig. 10 is a top view of a second embodiment of the measurement system of the present invention; and

Figs. 11, 12 and 13 are side views of the measurement system during receipt, transfer and measurement of the wafer, respectively.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE PRESENT INVENTION

Reference is now made to Fig. 2, which illustrates a measurement unit installable within a polishing machine, such as the IPEC Westech machine, the measurement system being constructed and operative in accordance with a preferred embodiment of the present invention and to Figs. 3, 4, 5, 6, 7 and 8 which illustrate the operation of a gripping system forming part of the measurement system of Fig. 2. Similar reference numerals are utilized to refer to elements of the water track previously discussed.

The measurement system, labeled 30, comprises an optical system 32 and a gripping system 34 operative in conjunction with a water track 36. The optical system 32 can be any optical system which measures the thickness of the top layer of the wafer through water. Fig. 9 provides one example of such a optical system; other optical systems are also incorporated into the present invention.

The gripping system 34 comprises a raisable gate 40, a translatable gripper 42, a vacuum pad 44 and a vacuum system 46. Gate 40 is controlled by a lifting mechanism 48 which raises and lowers gate 40 as necessary. Gate 40 has an upper surface 50 with a curved outer edge 52 and a plurality of protrusions 54 extending downward into the water from the upper surface 50. Protrusions 54 provide a lower surface onto which the gate 40 is lowered while enabling the water to pass through the gate 40. Curved edge 52 is shaped to match the curved edge of the wafer 25 so that, when gate 40 is in its lowered position, gate 40 will both keep the wafer 25 from passing out of the water track and to hold the wafer 25 in a repeatable location.

Gripper 42 translates between the wafer collecting position defined by the curved edge 52 and a wafer measuring location indicated in Fig. 2 by the wafer 25. Although not visible in Fig. 2, the base of the water track at the wafer measuring location has been replaced by a window 60 (Figs. 3 - 9) to enable the optical system 32 to view the patterned surface 62 of the wafer 25. For the purposes of the explanation, the patterned surface 62 is shown exaggeratedly in the Figures.

Gripper 42 can be translated by any translation system; an example of one such system is provided in Fig. 2 and labeled 64.

The vacuum pad 44 is typically a bellows-shaped pad and is mounted at the end of the gripper 42 and is connected to the vacuum system 46. The vacuum pad 44 creates a suction so that gripper 42 can raise the wafer 25 and move it from the wafer collecting position to the wafer measuring location. In addition, the vacuum is maintained during the measurement and only released once the measurement is complete.

Figs. 3 - 8 illustrate the operation of the gripping system 34. Initially, and as shown in Fig. 3, the jets, labeled 70, and the bubblers, labeled 72, of the water track are operated and the gate 40 is lowered. The polisher (not shown) places the wafer 25 within the water track and the streams 16 from the jets 70 push the wafer 25 towards the gate 40. The gripper 42 is at the wafer collecting position, shown to the left in Figs. 3 - 8.

Once the wafer 25 is in the wafer collecting position, as shown in Fig. 4, gripper 42 lowers vacuum pad 44 to grab the wafer 25. It will be appreciated that gripper 42 can be formed of any suitable mechanism, such as a piston, which can move vacuum pad 44 up and down on command. Since bubblers 72 are operating, the small streams 22 maintain the wafer 25 away from the base 14 of the water track.

The gripper 42 then pulls the wafer 25 out of the water (Fig. 5) and the jets 70 are deactivated. In accordance with a preferred embodiment of the present invention, the axis 74 of symmetry of the vacuum pad 44 is formed at a small angle α from the vertical axis 76. As a result, a long axis 75 of the wafer 25 is at the same small angle α to the horizontal axis 78. Angle α is typically in the range of 2 - 5°.

Translation unit 64 then moves gripper 42 to the wafer measuring position, shown to the right in Figs. 4 - 8. At the same time and as shown in Fig. 6, a pull-down mechanism slightly lowers the entire water track, gripping and optical system unit (at an angle of 1 - 3°), about a hinge 80 (Figs. 2 - 8), to force the water toward the wafer measuring position. Other methods of forcing the water towards the measuring position are also incorporated in the present invention.

After the lowering of the water track, gripper 42 lowers the wafer 25 towards the window 60. Since the vacuum pad 44 is angled, the wafer 25 does not enter the water all at once. Instead, wafer 25 enters the water gradually. Initially, only the side labeled 82 is immersed. As the gripper 42 pushes the vacuum pad 44 further down, more and more of the

wafer 25 becomes immersed until the entire wafer 25 is within the water. Vacuum pad 44 is flexible enough to accommodate the changed angle of wafer 25.

It will be appreciated that, by gradually immersing the wafer in the water, few, if any, bubbles are created near the patterned surface of the wafer 25.

5 It is noted that the wafer 25 does not rest against the window 60. Instead, it is held against protruding surfaces 84 such that there is a layer of water 86 between the wafer 25 and window 60. Due to the gradual immersion of wafer 25, layer 86 of water has little, if any, bubbles in it and therefore provides a uniform connecting medium between the optical system 32 and the patterned surface 62 of wafer 25.

10 Once the optical system 32 has finished measuring the patterned surface 62 of wafer 25, gripper 42 returns vacuum pad 44, with wafer 25 still attached, to its upper position. The pull-down mechanism rotates the water track about hinge 80 to return to its original position, 15 gate 40 is raised, and jets 70 and bubblers 72 are activated. The vacuum system 46 releases the vacuum and the wafers 25 falls into the water track. The flow of water causes the wafer 25 to move toward and under the now raised gate 40. A sensor 90 determines when the wafer 25 successfully passes out of the water track. The process described hereinabove can now begin for the next wafer.

20 Reference is now made to Fig. 9 which schematically illustrates an example of a suitable optical system 32. Optical system 32 is a microscope-based spectrophotometer and comprises an objective lens 100, a focusing lens 102, a beam splitter 104, a pin hole mirror 106, a relay lens 108 and a spectrophotometer 110. It additionally comprises a light source 112, a condenser 114, a charge coupled device (CCD) camera 116 and a second relay lens 118.

25 Light from light source 112 is provided, along an optical fiber 113, to condenser 114. In turn, condenser 114 directs the light towards beam splitter 104. Beam splitter 104 directs the light towards the wafer surface via lenses 102 and 100 and via window 60 and water layer 86.

30 The reflected light from the patterned surface 62 is collected by objective 100 and focused, by lens 102, onto pin hole mirror 106. Relay lens 108 receives the light passed through pin hole mirror 106 and focusses it onto the spectrophotometer 110.

Pin hole mirror 106 passes light through its hole towards spectrophotometer 110 and directs the light hitting the mirror surface towards CCD camera 114. Second relay lens 118 receives the light reflected by pin hole mirror 106 and focusses it onto the CCD camera 114.

Since the pinhole is placed at the center of the image plane which is the focal plane of lens 102, it acts as an aperture stop, allowing only the collimated portion of the light beam to pass through. Thus, the pinhole drastically reduces any scattered light in the system. Relay lens 108 collects the light from the pinhole and provides it to spectrophotometer 110.

Furthermore, since the pinhole is located at the image plane of the optical imaging system (lenses 100 and 102), only that portion of the light, reflected from the surface of wafer 25, which is the size of the pinhole divided by the magnification will come through the pinhole. Relay lens 118 collects the light and focusses it onto the CCD camera 114.

The pinhole serves to locate the measurement spot in the image of the wafer 25. Since the pinhole allows light to pass through it, rather than being reflected toward the CCD camera 114, the pinhole appears as a sharp dark point in the image produced by the lens 118. Thus, when viewing the CCD image, the location of the measurement spot is immediately known, it being the location of the dark spot.

Reference is now made to Figs. 10 - 14 which illustrate the thickness measuring of the present invention implemented in a polishing machine similar to that produced by Strasbaugh which has no water track. In this embodiment, the polishing machine or an external robot (not shown) brings the wafers 25 to an exit station of the polisher. When the measurement has finished, the robot brings the wafers 25 to their cassette at another exit station. Fig. 10 is a top view and Figs. 11, 12 and 13 illustrate the measuring station in three states.

The measuring station 130 comprises a gripping unit 132, an optical system 134 and a water bath 136. The optical system 134 is located beneath the water bath 136 and can be any suitable optical system, such as the one described hereinabove. As in the previous embodiment, the water bath 136 has a window in its bottom surface, labeled 140 in Fig. 11, through which the optical system 134 can illuminate the wafer 25.

The gripping unit 132 comprises a wafer support 150, illustrated as being formed of two support elements, a vacuum pad 152, similar to vacuum pad 44, and a piston 160. The polisher places the wafer 25 on the wafer support 150 while the vacuum pad 152 is initially in a position above the support 150, as shown in Fig. 11. Once the wafer support 150 has

the wafer in a predefined position, the vacuum pad 152, which is controlled by piston 160, moves toward the wafer and grabs it by applying a vacuum. Now that the vacuum pad 152 is holding the wafer, the wafer supports 150 move away, as indicated.

5 The piston 160 then pushes the vacuum pad-wafer combination toward the water bath 136. This is shown in Fig. 12 which also illustrates that the vacuum pad 152 holds the wafer 25 at a small angle α to the horizontal. The angle α is provided since, as in the previous embodiment, the axis of symmetry of the vacuum pad 152 is formed at a small angle α from the vertical axis. As in the previous embodiment, by immersing the wafer 25 into the water at the angle α , few, if any, bubbles, remain on the undersurface of the wafer after full 10 immersion.

15 Fig. 13 illustrates the wafer 25 at its fully immersed, measurement position. Typically, wafer 25 does not directly touch the water surface 163 of the window 140; instead, it sits on a measurement support 168. The result is that there is a water layer 164 between the wafer 25 and the surface 163 of the window.

20 Once the measurement process has finished, the piston 160 returns the wafer 25 to its original position and the wafer support elements 150 return to their wafer receiving position. The piston 160 places the wafer 25 on the wafer support elements 150 and releases the vacuum. The external robot can now take the wafer to another exit station where there is a cassette of processed and measured wafers.

25 It will be appreciated by persons skilled in the art that the present invention is not limited to what has been particularly shown and described hereinabove. Rather the scope of the present invention is defined by the claims which follow:

CLAIMS

1. A wafer polisher having thickness measurement capabilities, the polisher comprising:
 - a. a polishing unit for polishing a top layer of a wafer in the presence of a slurry;
 - b. a thickness measuring unit mounted on said polisher for measuring the thickness of said top layer while said wafer is immersed in said water.
2. A polisher according to claim 1 and wherein said polisher comprises an output track with said water flowing therein, said output track comprises a bottom surface having a window mounted therein.
3. A polisher according to claim 2 and wherein said thickness measuring unit comprises:
 - a. a curved gate having a radius of curvature generally similar to that of said wafer, said curved gate being located at a gripping position;
 - b. a gripper for moving said wafer from said gripping position to a measuring position above a layer of water located above said window; and
 - c. an optical system, mounted underneath said window, for measuring said thickness of said top layer through said window and said layer of water.
4. A polisher according to claim 1 and also comprising a pull-down unit for pulling at least said bottom surface below the horizontal.
5. A thickness measuring unit for mounting on a water track of a polisher for measuring the thickness of a top layer of a wafer, said thickness measuring unit comprising:
 - a. a curved gate having a radius of curvature generally similar to that of said wafer, said curved gate being located at a gripping position;
 - b. a window mounted in a bottom surface of said water track;
 - c. a gripper for moving said wafer from said gripping position to a measuring position above a layer of water located above said window; and
 - d. an optical system, mounted underneath said window, for measuring said thickness of said top layer through said window and said layer of water.

6. A unit according to claim 5 and wherein said gripper comprises a gripping pad mounted to said gripper, wherein an axis of symmetry of said gripping pad is at an angle to the horizontal.

5 7. A unit according to claim 6 and wherein said gripping pad comprises a bellows shaped pad and operates in conjunction with a vacuum pump for creating a suction within said pad.

10 8. A polisher according to claim 1 and wherein said thickness measuring unit comprises:

- a. a water bath having a window in a bottom surface thereof;
- b. a gripper for moving said wafer from a gripping position above said water bath to a measuring position above a layer of water located above said window; and
- c. an optical system, mounted underneath said window, for measuring said thickness of said top layer through said window and said layer of water.

15 9. A thickness measuring unit for mounting on a water bath for measuring the thickness of a top layer of a wafer, said thickness measuring unit comprising:

- a. a water bath;
- b. a window mounted in a bottom surface of said water bath;
- c. a gripper for moving said wafer from a gripping position above said water bath to a measuring position above a layer of water located above said window; and
- d. an optical system, mounted underneath said window, for measuring said thickness of said top layer through said window and said layer of water.

20 25 10. A unit according to claim 9 wherein said gripper comprises a gripping pad mounted to said gripper, and wherein an axis of symmetry of said gripping pad is at an angle to the horizontal.

30 11. A method of placing a wafer in a water without introducing generally any bubbles underneath said wafer, the method comprising the step of immersing said wafer within said water such that the plane of said wafer is at an angle to the surface of said water.

12. A method according to claim 11 and comprising the step of pressing said wafer against a surface which is parallel to a measurement window underneath the surface of said water.

5 13. A method of measuring the thickness of a polished top layer of a wafer before removing said wafer from a polishing machine, said method comprising the steps of:

10 a. picking said wafer up from a gripping position;

b. moving said wafer from said gripping position to a measuring position;

c. placing said wafer in said measuring position underneath a surface of said water but a thin layer of said water located above a window; and

d. measuring said thickness of said top layer through said window and said layer of water.

15 14. A method according to claim 13 and wherein said step of placing comprises the step of immersing said wafer within said water such that the plane of said wafer is at an angle to the surface of said water.

20 15. A method according to claim 13 wherein said water is held within a water bath and wherein said step of moving comprises the step of changing the angle of the lower surface of said water bath to move said water towards said measuring position.

16. A method according to claim 14 wherein said water is held within a water bath and wherein said step of moving comprises the step of changing the angle of the lower surface of said water bath to move said water towards said measuring position.

25

ABSTRACT

An optical system is disclosed for the inspection of wafers during polishing which also includes a measurement system for measuring the thickness of the wafer's top layer. The optical system views the wafer through a window and includes a gripping system, which places the wafer in a predetermined viewing location while maintaining the patterned surface completely under water. The optical system also includes a pull-down unit for pulling the measurement system slightly below the horizontal prior to the measurement and returns the measuring system to the horizontal afterwards.

I hereby certify that this correspondence is being deposited with the United States Postal Service as express mail in an envelope addressed to: Commissioner of Patents and Trademarks, Washington, D.C. 20231, on June 29, 1995. Express Mail Receipt No. TB 856095075 US

669125
Date of Signature



IN THE UNITED STATES PATENT AND TRADEMARK OFFICE

Applicant(s): Finarov, Moshe; Dvir, Eran; Haimovich, Eli; Shulman, Benjamin
Assignee: Nova Measuring Instruments, Inc.
Title: APPARATUS FOR OPTICAL INSPECTION OF WAFERS DURING POLISHING
Serial No.: Unknown Filed: Herewith
Examiner: Unknown Group Art Unit: Unknown
Docket No.: M-3417-2C US

San Jose, California
February 4, 2000

BOX PATENT APPLICATION
ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER FOR PATENTS
Washington, D. C. 20231

**REQUEST TO AMEND DRAWINGS
UNDER 37 C.F.R. § 1.121**

Sir:

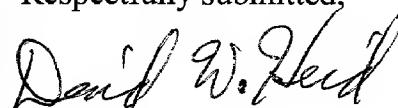
Pursuant to 37 C.F.R. §1.121, Applicant(s) respectfully request(s) permission to amend Figs. 6, 7, 8 and 9 as shown in red on the accompanying sheets.

Should the Examiner have any questions concerning this request, the Examiner is invited to call the undersigned at (408) 453-9200.

EXPRESS MAIL LABEL NO:

EL 375 478 733 US

Respectfully submitted,



David W. Heid
Attorney for Applicant(s)
Reg. No. 25,875

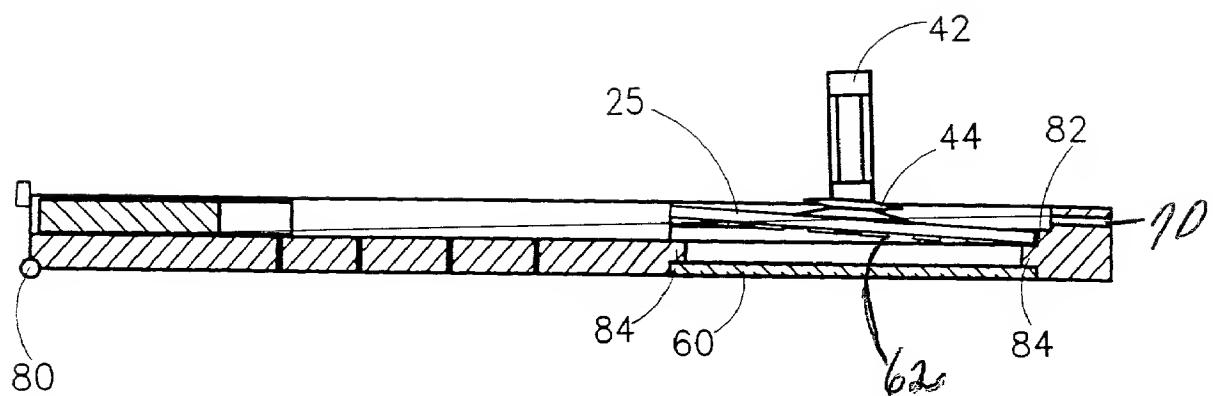


FIG. 6

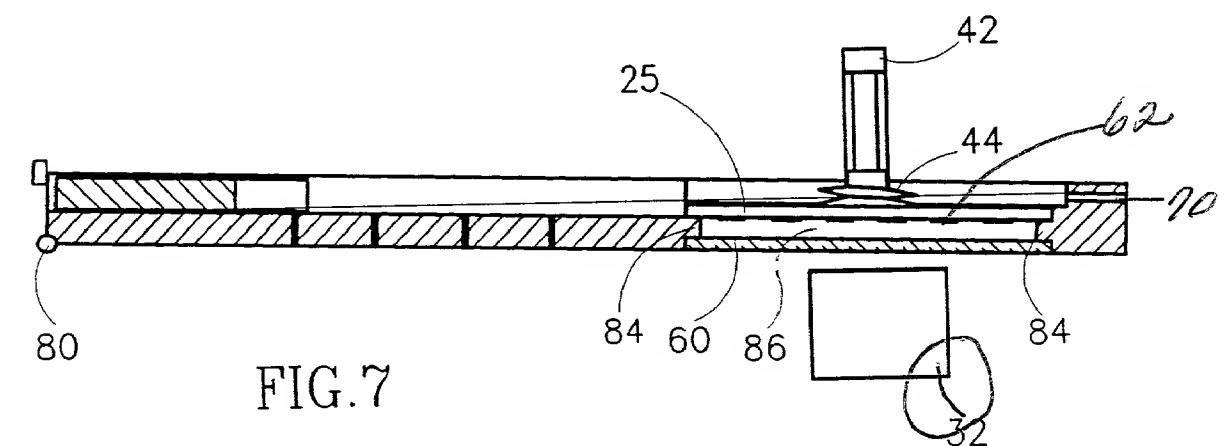


FIG. 7

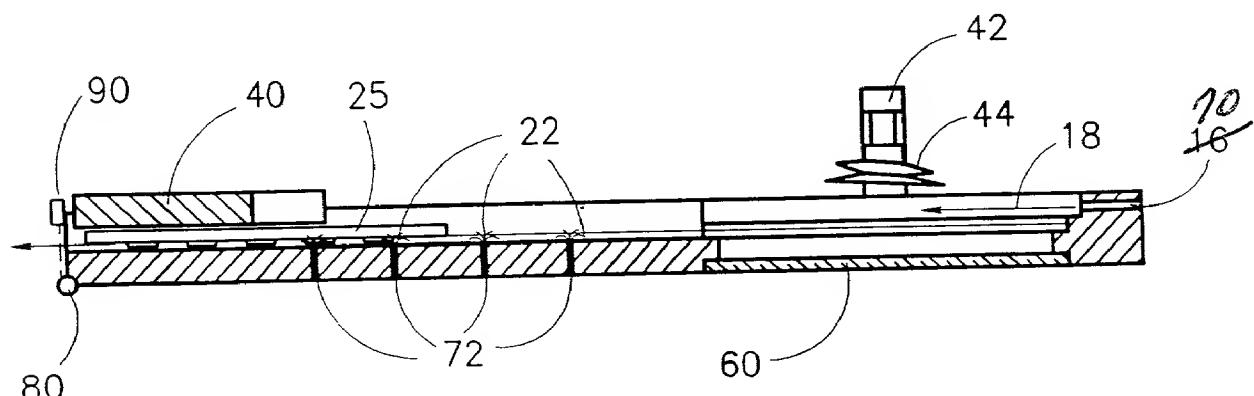
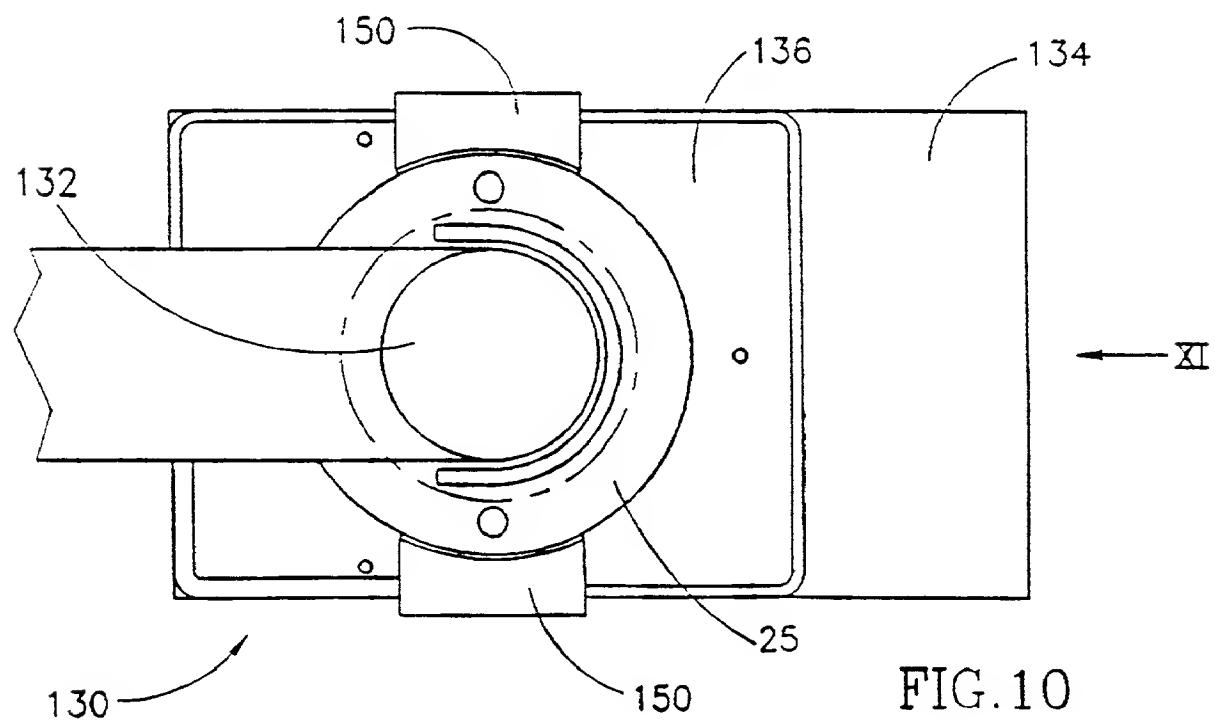
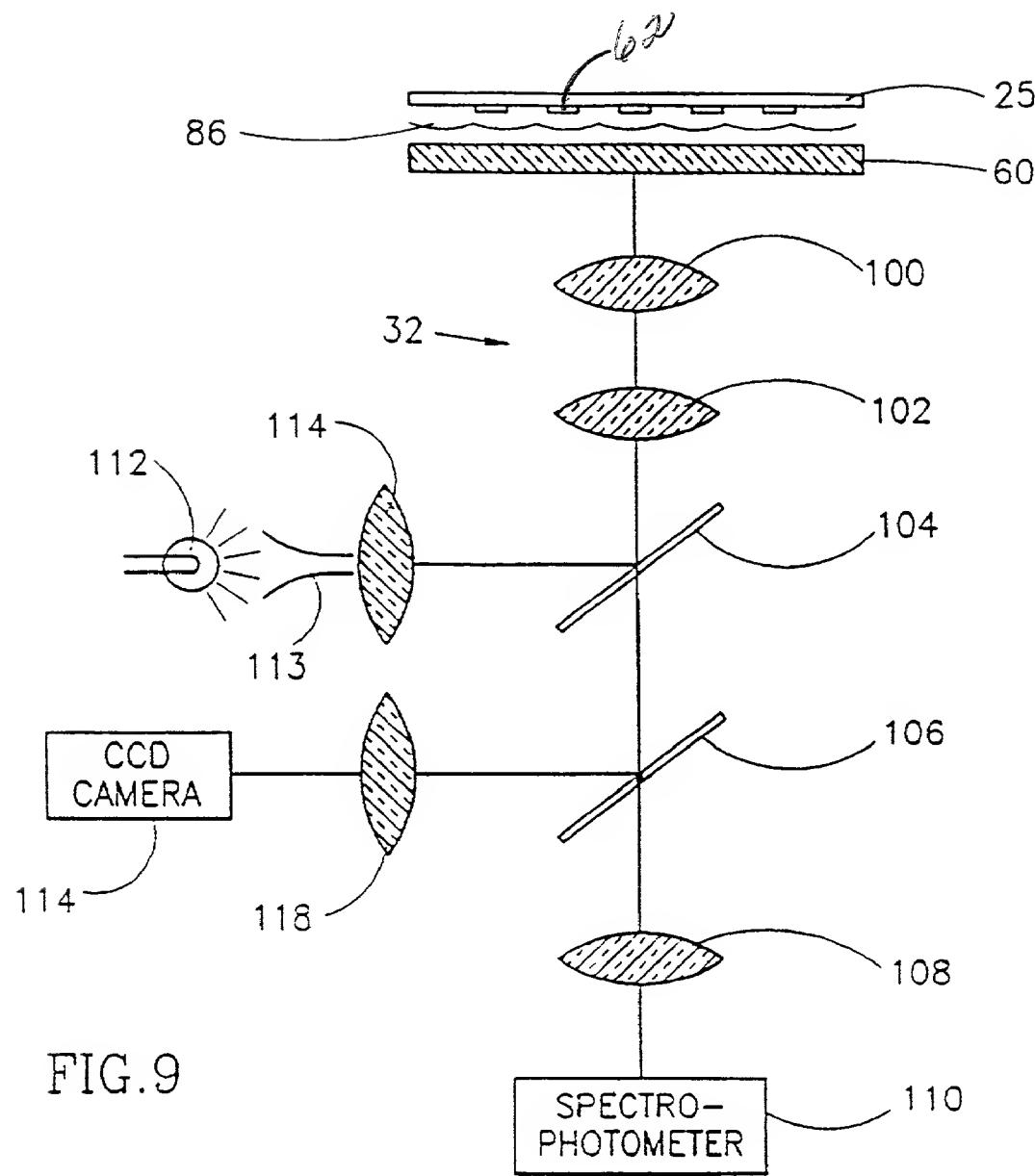


FIG. 8



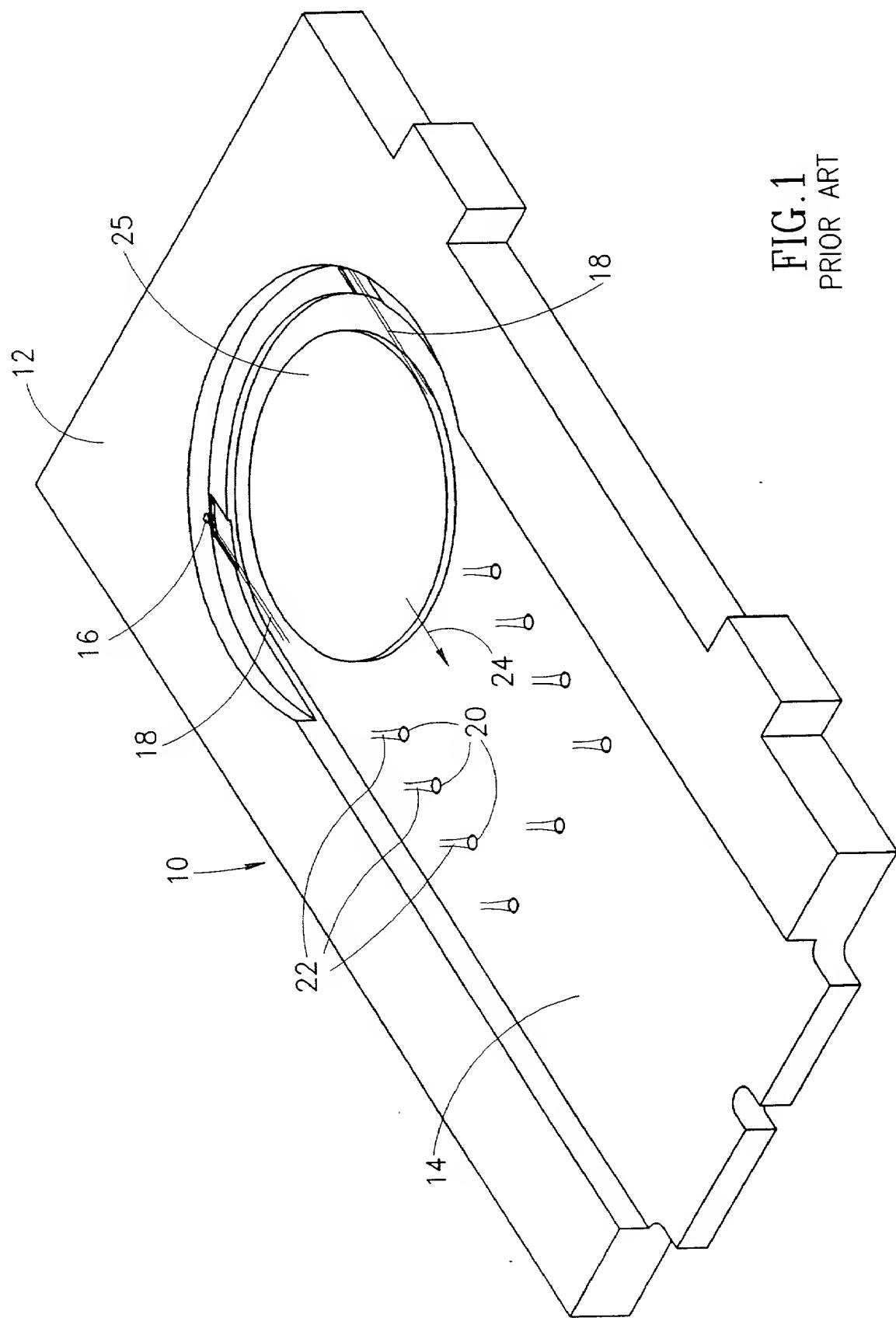
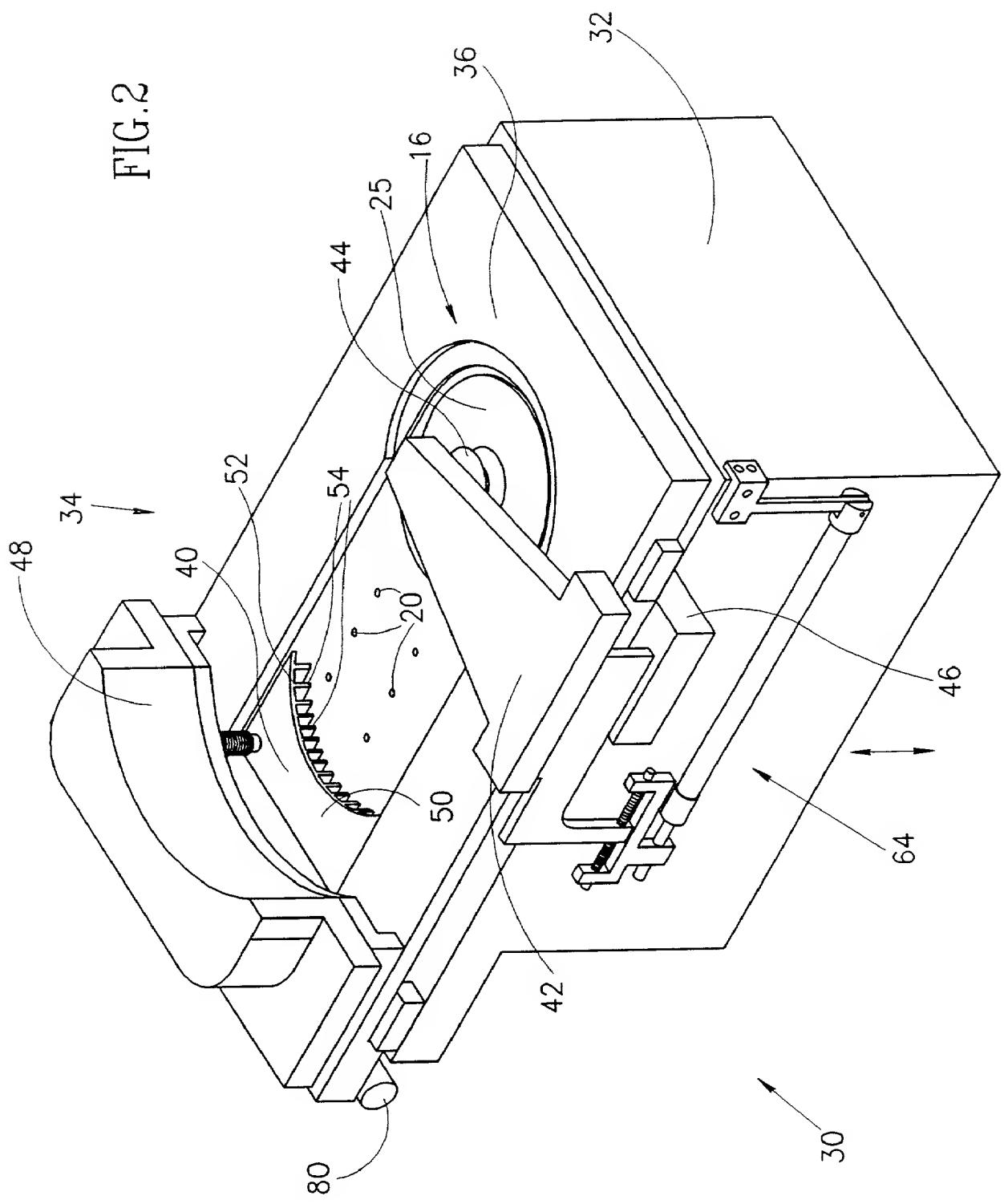


FIG. 1
PRIOR ART

FIG. 2



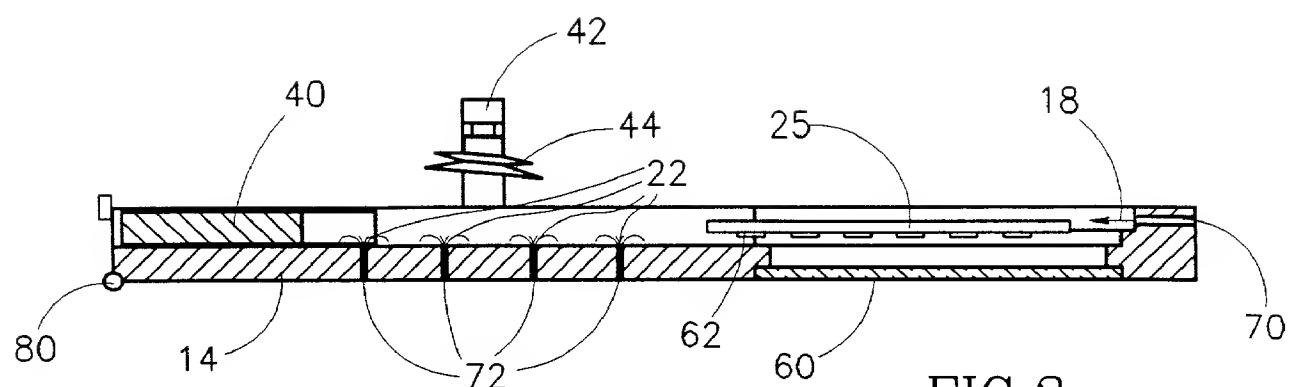


FIG.3

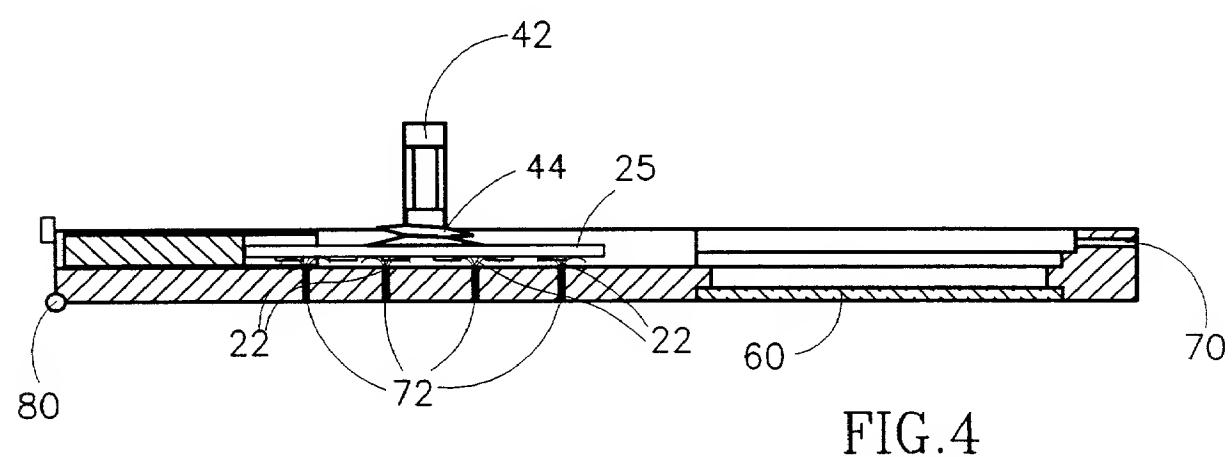


FIG.4

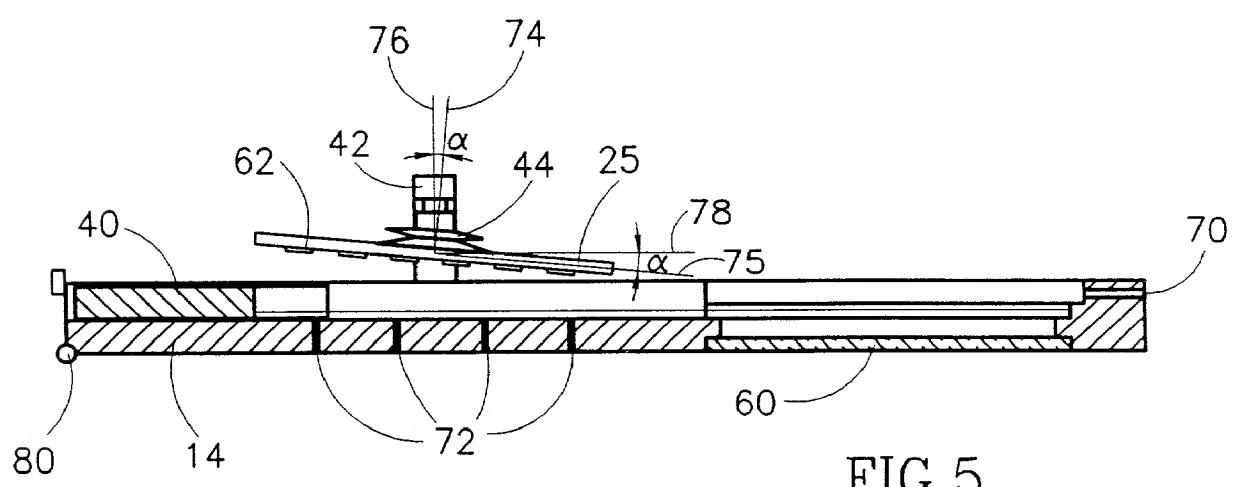


FIG.5

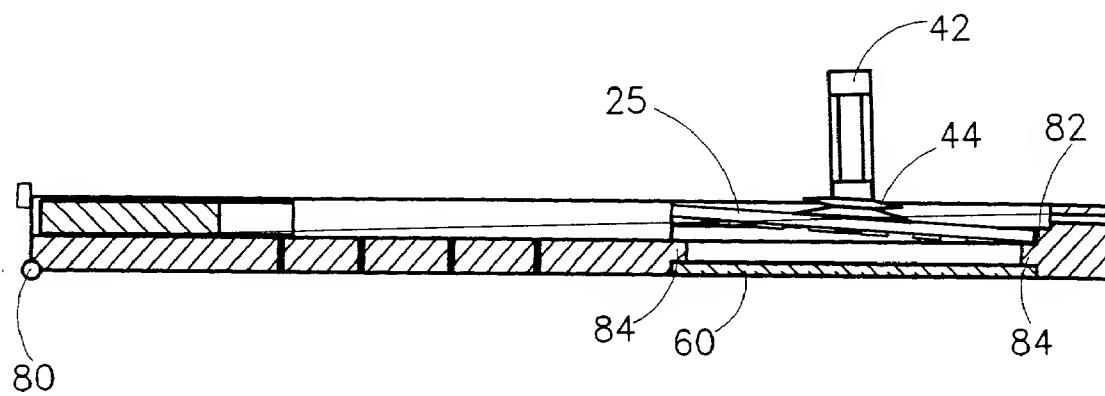


FIG. 6

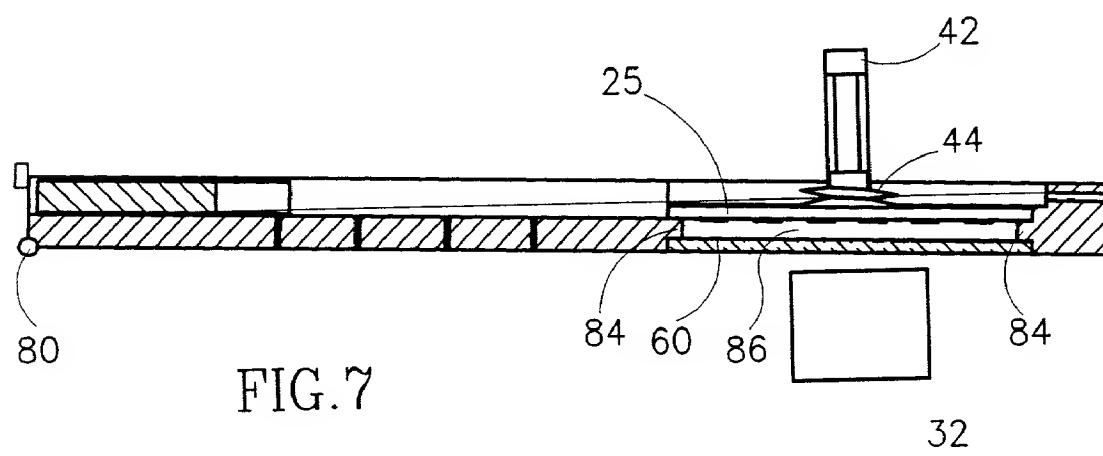


FIG. 7

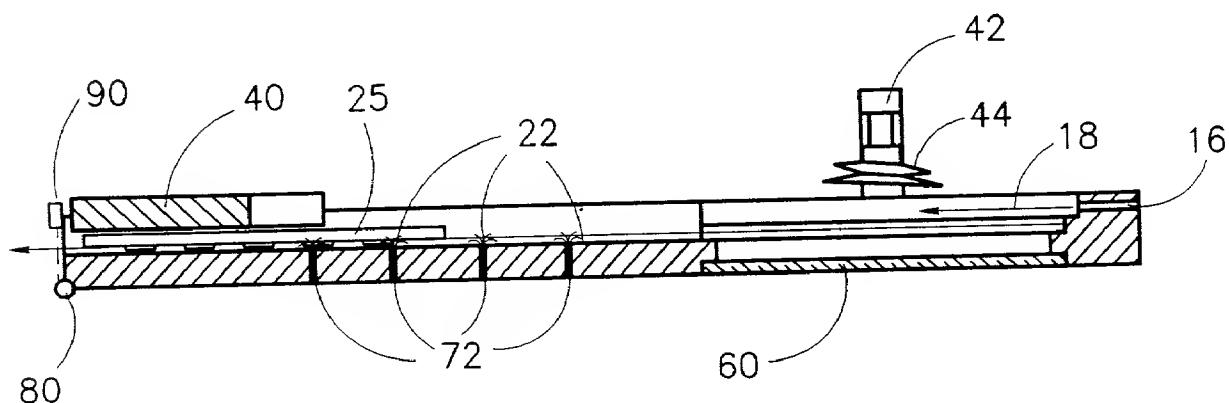
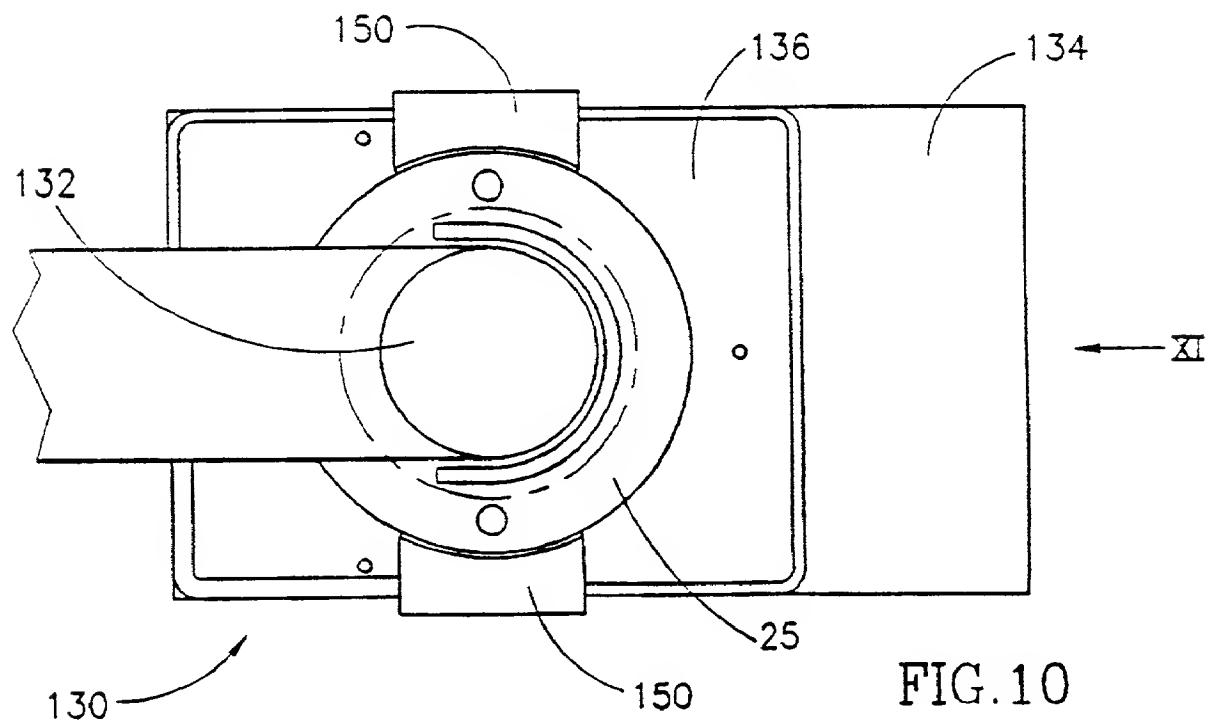
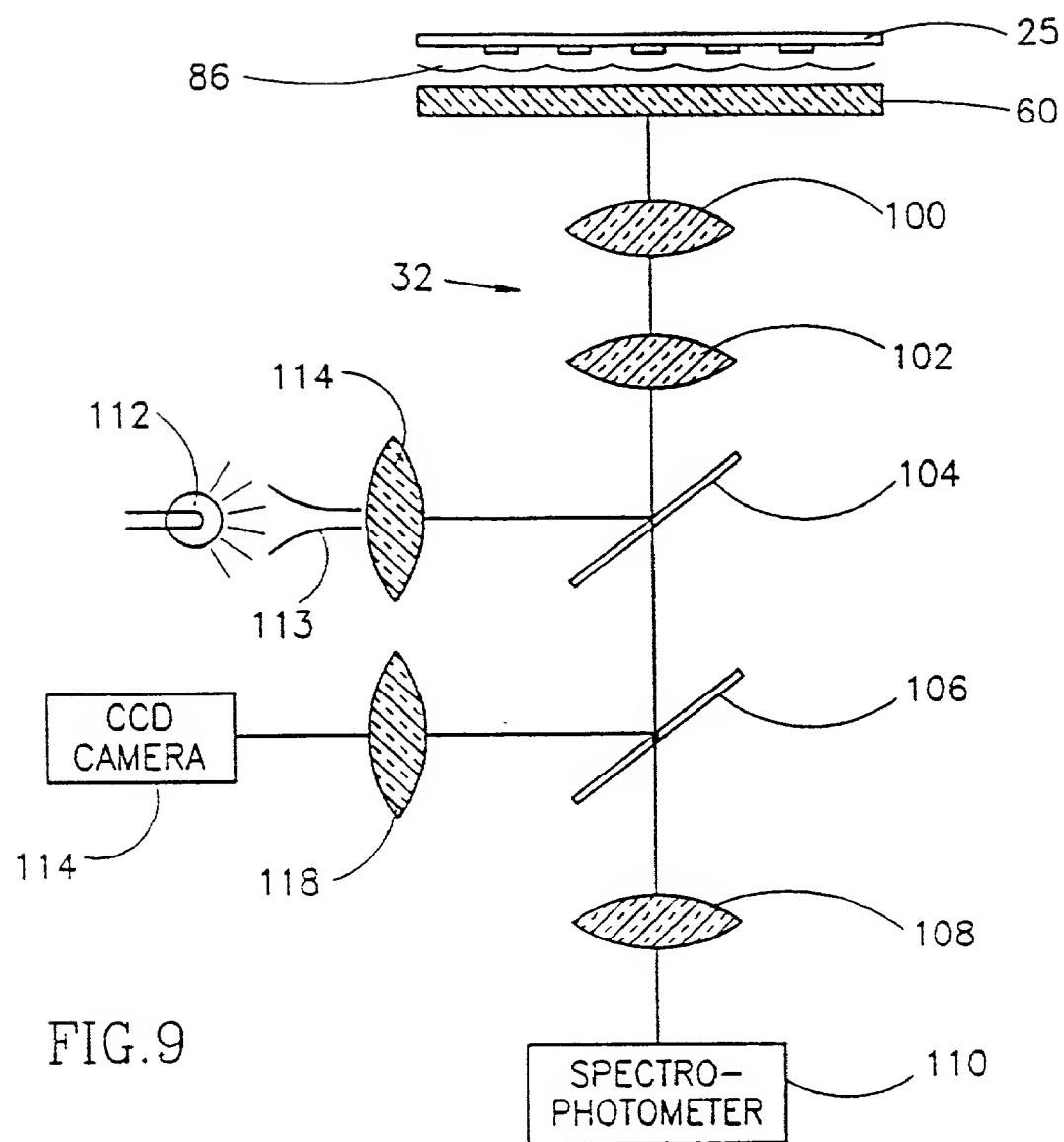


FIG. 8



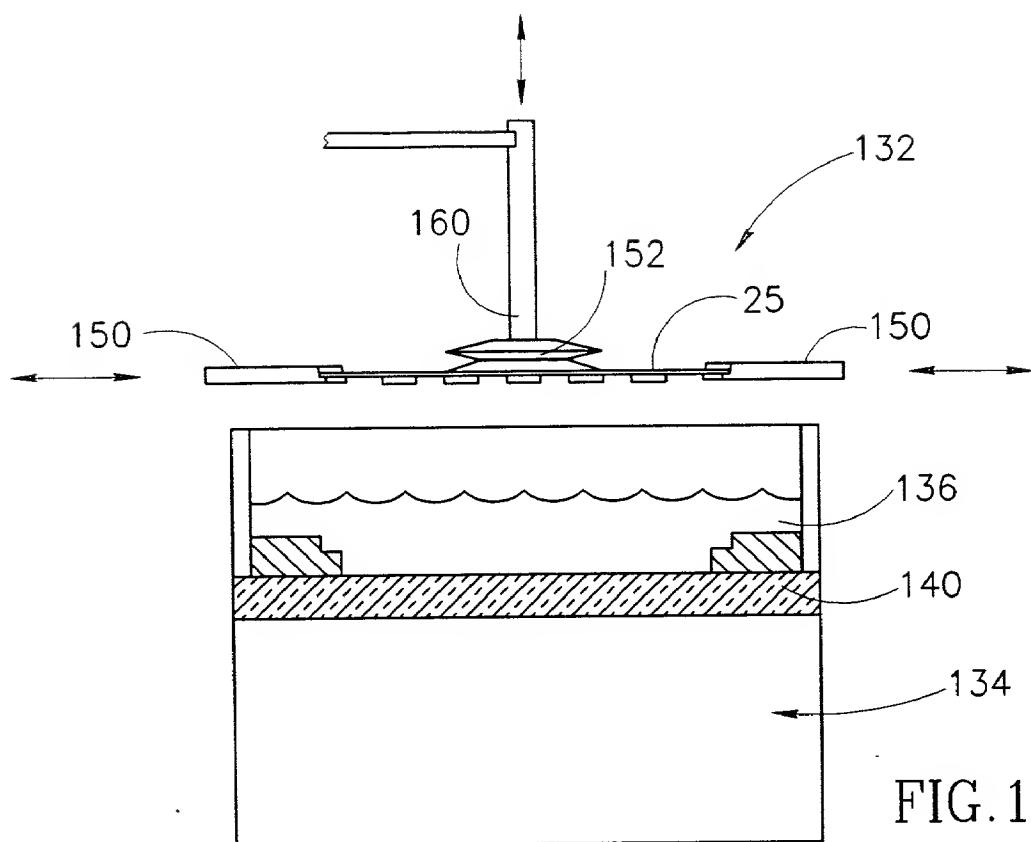


FIG. 11

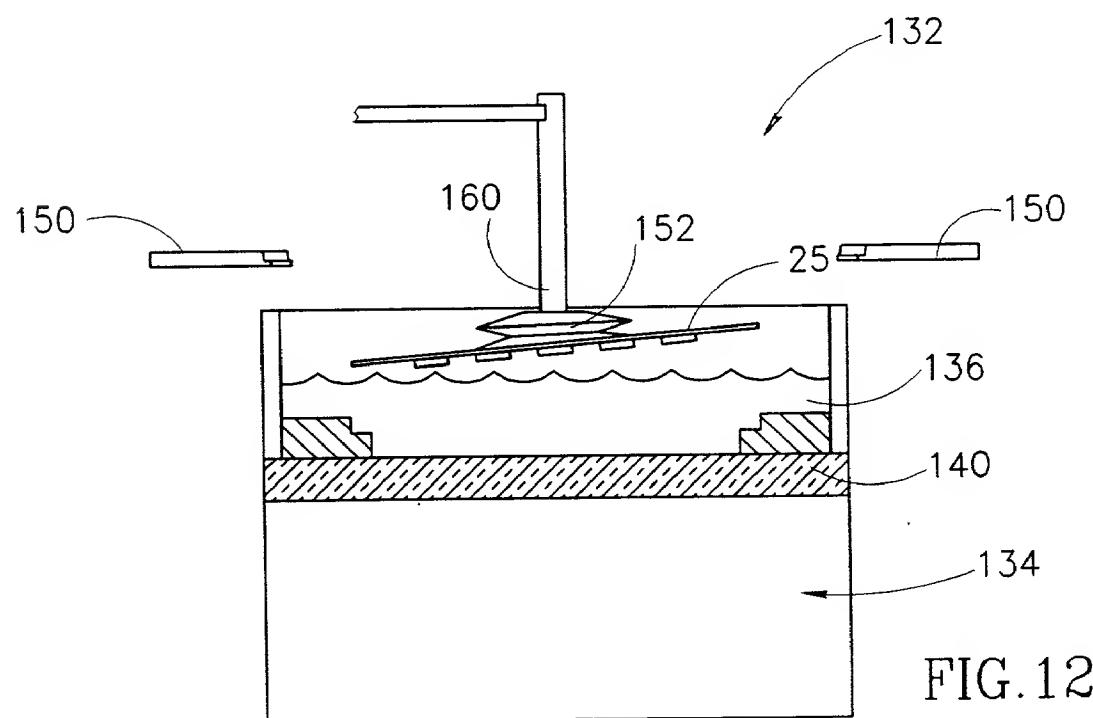


FIG. 12

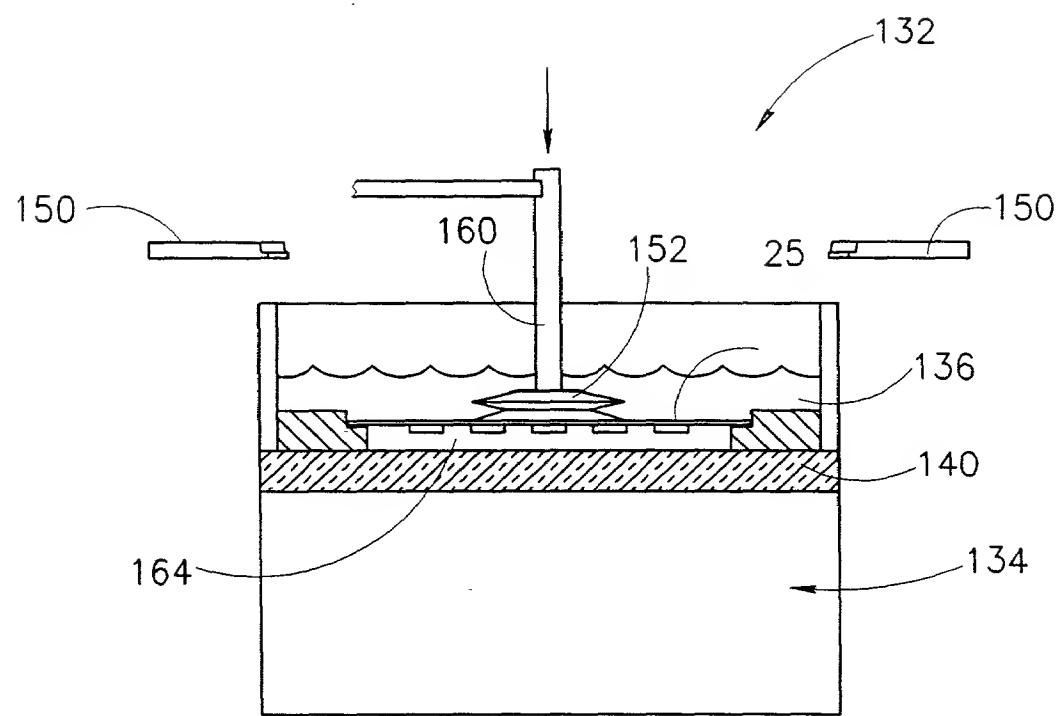


FIG.13

DECLARATION FOR PATENT APPLICATION

As a below named inventor, I hereby declare that:

My residence, post office address and citizenship are as stated below adjacent to my name.

I believe I am the original, first and sole inventor (if only one name is listed below) or an original, first and joint inventor (if plural names are listed below) of subject matter (process, machine, manufacture, or composition of matter, or an improvement thereof) that is claimed and for which a patent is solicited by way of the application entitled APPARATUS FOR OPTICAL INSPECTION OF WAFERS DURING POLISHING which (check) is attached hereto.
 and is amended by the Preliminary Amendment attached hereto.
 was filed on June 29, 1995 as Application Serial No. 08/497,382
 and was amended on _____ (if applicable).

I hereby state that I have reviewed and understand the contents of the above identified application, including the claims, as amended by any amendment referred to above.

I acknowledge the duty to disclose information which is material to the examination of this application in accordance with Title 37, Code of Federal Regulations, §1.56(a).

I hereby claim foreign priority benefits under Title 35, United States Code, §119 of any foreign application(s) for patent or inventor's certificate listed below and have also identified below any foreign application for patent or inventor's certificate having a filing date before that of the application on which priority is claimed:

Prior Foreign Application(s)			Priority Claimed	
113829 (Number)	Israel (Country)	23 May, 1995 (Day/Month/Year Filed)	Yes	No
_____ (Number)	_____ (Country)	_____ (Day/Month/Year Filed)	Yes	No
_____ (Number)	_____ (Country)	_____ (Day/Month/Year Filed)	Yes	No

I hereby claim the benefit under Title 35, United States Code, §120 of any United States application(s) listed below and, insofar as any subject matter of this application is not disclosed in the prior United States application in the manner provided by the first paragraph of Title 35, United States Code, §112, I acknowledge the duty to disclose material information as defined in Title 37, Code of Federal Regulations, §1.56(a) which occurred between the filing date of the prior application(s) and the national or PCT international filing date of this application:

NA (Application Serial No.)	(Filing Date)	(Status-patented, pending, abandoned)
(Application Serial No.)	(Filing Date)	(Status-patented, pending, abandoned)

I hereby appoint the following attorney(s) and/or agent(s) to prosecute this application and to transact all business in the United States Patent and Trademark Office connected therewith:

Alan H. MacPherson (24,423); Thomas S. MacDonald (17,774); Richard Franklin (19,128); Kenneth E. Leeds (30,566); Paul J. Winters (25,246); Brian D. Ogonowsky (31,988); David W. Heid (25,875); Guy W. Shoup (26,805); Forrest E. Gunnison (32,899); Norman R. Klivans (33,003); David H. Carroll (29,903); Edward C. Kwok (33,938); Patrick T. Bever (33,834); David E. Steuber (25,557); Michael Shenker (34,250); Laura Terlizzi (31,307); T. Lester Wallace (34,748); Ronald J. Meetin (29,089); and David R. Graham (36,150); Ken John Koestner (33,004); Mark P. Kahler (29,178); Stephen A. Terrile (32,946); Omker K. Suryadevara (36,320); David T. Millers (37,396); E. Eric Hoffman (38,186); and Lawrence E. Lycke (38,540).

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Forrest E. Gunnison, Esq.

Attorney for Applicant(s)

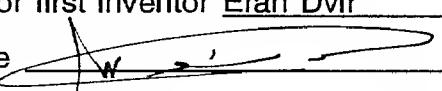
SKJERVEN, MORRILL, MacPHERSON, FRANKLIN & FRIEL
25 Metro Drive, Suite 700
San Jose, California 95110-1349

Telephone: 408-453-9200

Facsimile: 408-453-7979

I hereby declare that all statements made herein of my own knowledge are true and that all statements made on information and belief are believed to be true; and further that these statements were made with the knowledge that willful false statements and the like so made are punishable by fine or imprisonment, or both, under Title 18, United States Code, § 1001 and that such willful false statements may jeopardize the validity of the application or any patent issued thereon.

Full Name of sole or first inventor Eran Dvir

Inventor's signature 

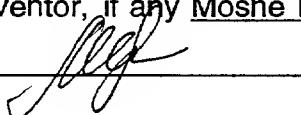
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